

## RELIGION

Written by Raymond Edwards in 1976

As a boy I was brought up to believe that every word in the Bible was the word of God. Of course I believed the Story of Creation and I accepted the theology that has been built up through the centuries around that story. It was not until I reached high school that I began to question these beliefs. In those days I had planned to become a minister in the Methodist Church. I can remember the sad day when I made the decision that I must postpone my thoughts about the ministry until I could make a judgment between what the pulpit was saying and what it seemed to me science was saying. Having no more knowledge than the typical high school boy, one might think I pushed the whole subject off my mind. That would be wrong. I was serious about becoming a minister; I thought God had spoken to me, just as in ancient days he had spoken to the people of the Old Testament. I went through many agonizing and prayerful days and nights asking myself, "If God walked on earth and talked to the patriarchs of old, why does he not talk to me now"? "If he did not talk to Moses, who did"? I asked my minister about my problem but his answer did not satisfy me, so I had to find my own answers. My life has been spent in search of those answers. I am now 82 years old and I have come to the conclusion that in the words of Shakespeare, science and Christian religion "ne'r the twain shall meet". This is not said in criticism of the teachings of Christ, but of the doctrines added to them by the Greek and Roman theologians.

Since the development of science and Protestantism have both occurred during the same period of time, one would expect to find some correlation between the two. Both had their beginning with the revival of learning after that 1,000-year-night known as the Dark Ages. The first public library in Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 A.D. was opened in Italy in 1436; the first printing press with metal type was invented in 1450; Copernicus, the father of science, as we know it today, was born in Poland in 1473; Martin Luther, the father of Protestantism was born in Germany in 1483; and America was discovered in 1492. Other religious leaders besides Luther were born during those momentous years; other scientific thinkers were developing the techniques of their new discipline but the power of the Church prevented their messages from reaching the people.

It was not until 1517 that the printing press had created a public opinion in Germany strong enough to support Luther in his efforts to reform the established Church, an effort which ended with the establishment of a new institution known then as the Reformed Church but now known as the Lutheran Church. This effort by Luther marks the beginning of a religious movement now known as Protestantism. Copernicus had his theory in astronomy ready for

publication about 1530, but fearing the power of the church, it was not published until the year of his death in 1543.

We can say that the work of Copernicus was the beginning of a long line of discoveries by scientists in their search for the secrets of nature while Luther was first in a long line of theologians to attempt to adjust religious doctrines into the realities of nature as they related to the pre-Lutheran concepts of God. During the ensuing years as science has discovered more and more of nature's secrets, theology has found it necessary to constantly revise its interpretation of its concept of God to meet the challenges of science. Protestantism has now become a conglomerate of doctrines concerning the interpretation of the God idea while many former believers have deserted the church, saying there is no God as Christianity defines the word.

It is hard for young people in our enlightened age to understand the thinking of people who lack the knowledge of science as it relates to nature. Yet there are many who do lack that knowledge. To them, God still sends the rain. They have no understanding of evaporation, atmospheric pressure, condensation, and gravity as it relates to weather nor to the countless other phenomena now so commonly used in our everyday lives.

None of these phenomena were understood until discovered by science; all, and many more can be produced in a laboratory. Vapor can be produced on the kitchen stove. All have been put to man's use. Scientifically minded people no longer think of them as "God given". Rather, they are thought of as a product of the mind of man, a product of knowledge. It is such pressure from scientific investigation that has made it so hard for religion to interpret God as a viable force in our lives today.

We have here two forces that seem to have collided. It might be well to try to understand how these two forces operate. We are told that man has always been inquisitive. He wants to know so he asks questions. It also seems there has usually been someone around who *thought* he knew the answers. However, their answers were based on speculation – their "idea" of what was the answer. Religion has always accepted speculation (a dream, or a spiritual experience) as truth. It has built its moral code on such speculation. Science, however, will not accept speculation as true. It may begin its search for truth by speculating – seeking for ideas – but those ideas must be proven true, proven to the extent that "other scientists can obtain the same results by following the same procedures".

There have been many ideas about God since man arrived on earth and each god has been accepted as true by those who believed it true. Each such god has lost its influence – died – as new facts discredited the old "facts" upon which the belief was founded. To explain what I mean: At one time, the ancient Egyptian people thought the sun was a god. To explain his daily passing across

the sky, they were told he rode in a chariot driven by four horses, and he returned each night to his home in the East to prepare for another ride the next day. The people were accustomed to seeing their king ride in a chariot drawn by four horses so it seemed natural to them that god should travel the same way.

Copernicus proved this speculation wrong but he could not have done so had not another scientist before him learned that by grinding pieces of flat glass in a certain way which still earlier scientists had learned to make in a certain way; then putting several of them together in a tube in a certain way, one could look through that tube (a telescope) into the night sky and see things that would begin to revolutionize man's idea of Creation. That is the way science has developed – one man learns a new fact which other men use to learn other new facts. All these new facts added together has given us the knowledge which has caused so many people today to think the Christian God is dead.

I believe science has accumulated enough facts by which we can develop a new creation story upon which a new idea of God can be erected for the benefit of those who no longer believe in the Moses study of Creation. Many such people will say "If God is dead, why resurrect Him?" Such people fail to understand the meaning or the purpose of the God idea. We hear it said that man has always been able to meet any need if and when a need arises. Might it not be that the idea of God is in reality an idea of man which he has devised to meet his need? If the answer is yes, we can say that man needs God today just as much as at any other time in the past; maybe more so.

To me, God is the lever by which mankind has lifted itself to the position it now holds above the other animals. When man forgets God, he returns to the status of the animals from which he emerged. History and archeology tells us man has been many centuries in this slow upward climb. It records many failures. Some such failures have been irreversible but in other instances, men have taken the torch (God idea) and started on a new climb.

Today we seem to be at the peak of a "what has been," but not of a "what can be"; have we already developed that torch? Can we pick it up again before it is too late? I am sure the answer is yes but the question is how. To me, the God of Moses can take us no further. Moses made his God to meet his problems; Jesus revised the God of Moses to meet the understanding of his day and the Greek and Roman theologians adapted the Jewish idea to meet the superstitions of their people.

We like to think that God is Divine but it is only the concept that is Divine. Man has made it so because his own experience has made it so. If man's environment never changed, his concept of God would never change. Man's mind – his knowledge – makes it possible for him to change his environment. Such changes always cause changes in his concept of God. When those

changes come slowly, he has no trouble accommodating to them. During the last century, these changes have come so fast that he is unable to adapt to them. We are befuddled. Even our leaders do not know the answers. Before we can hope to find answers, I believe we must establish new standards, new interpretations of Divine Law. Most of these will be no more than adaptations but some will be reinterpretations. To do this, I think we, like Moses, will find it necessary to begin with a new concept of God. I believe our young people are ready for – even waiting – for such a concept.

I believe the Theory of Evolution offers us a new Creation story – a new starting point from which we can develop a new concept of God, of heaven, of hell; even a new concept of the devil; a concept that science can accept and help us develop. Viewed in its broad context, I believe there is still a fundamental desire for the moral way of life as Jesus taught it. Our problem is that we do not know how to interpret his teaching to our problems. How can we meet the problems of caring for the poor and the unemployed? Jesus told the rich young man to "sell all his possessions and follow me." We've been doing that but it doesn't seem to work. I could go on and on. with other examples.

To me, man's knowledge is the cause for his rise above the other animals. The Theory of Evolution will enable us to put man in his rightful place in nature's scheme of things. It will not make him a God. He will still be a human, trying, as he always has, to meet the everyday problems of life as his new knowledge gives him a new environment which, in turn, gives him new problems. It has always been man's problem and it always will be. The only way he can avoid it is to stop the accumulation of new knowledge, which means a return to the Dark Ages. Negativism has no place in modern religion. Let's make man a rising animal – not a fallen angel. Let's put positivism to work solving our problems.

In the meantime, as we wait, let's not think of God as dead. He is only waiting in the background for man to introduce Him in his new clothes – waiting to help man solve his new problems.